"HE" A Short Story by Katherine Ann Porter, A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Barthesian & Derridean Approaches

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Abstract—The purpose of the current study is to demonstrate the process of analyzing a text of a short story through adopting the approach of “Readerly text” and “Plurality” by employing two analytical theories of Barthes and Derrida respectively. In addition, the researcher adopted a psycholinguistic analysis method along with the two aforementioned approaches in order to add a valuable dimension to the interpretation of these two approaches. The analytical methodology is applied on a short story entitled “He” by Katherine Ann Porter (1927) by classifying it into 27 lexias and analyzing it utilizing the “five codes” of Barthes and the “deconstruction theory” of Derrida with a psycholinguistics interference. This study provides the reader with the ability of creating meaning throughout the process of reading according to the social, cultural, scientific and psychological setting. However, the meaning gained is not a stable entity. Within these two approaches comes the psycholinguistic analysis of the text to support the concept that proposes that each linguistic means has psycholinguistic dimension.

KEYWORDS: Barthesian and Derridean approach, Plurality, Deconstruction, Psycholinguistics analysis, signifier, “He”

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INTRODUCTION

The current study employs three analytical theories in adopting the idea of “Plurality”: 1. Barthe’s five codes for identifying and analyzing the short story "He" which examines the extent at which the theory can be used and can be relevant within a particular social and cultural environment. 2. Derrida’s deconstruction theory to show how much language is more precarious and ambiguous than we realize. 3. The researcher, as a psycholinguist, has applied an additional analysis at which linguistic means; like lexical choices, syntactic structure, phonological and morphological units, capitalization and (lexical) diversity, etc. play a significant role in highlighting the psycholinguistic assumptions to identify the characters’ feelings, intentions, desires, fears, surprise, joy, etc. which is necessary in literary text analysis and interpretation. This analysis is extremely beneficial since it can be utilized to investigate and transmit the emotional content of the text to the reader.

Derrida argues that language has two significant characteristics. The play of signifiers continually defers (postpones) meaning. The meaning which appears to have the result of the differences by which the reader distinguishes one signifier from another.

The study of semiotic is a human science which widely determines that human tries to seek understanding in a systematic perspective. The way is to underline fundamental structures of all human experience (Tyson, 2006: 209-210). Literature is only one of the human experiences variety or productions that Structuralism is keen to understand. In literature, it is the study of the structural system of a literary text. It attempts to discover the underlying structures, codes and rules that shape a particular text.

Hence, the meaning or the thematic side of other texts has a secondary importance for structuralism.

Roland Barthes, a French structuralist, a philosopher and a linguist, in his book S / Z (1970) described and demonstrated methods of literary analysis. While analyzing Balzac’s story, ‘Sarrasine’, he identified his five well-known codes, i.e. hermeneutic code, proairetic code, semantic code, symbolic code and cultural code. These codes reflect a network forming a capacity of meaning at which the text runs through. On the other hand, the psycholinguistic analysis is a parallel process accompanied by the aforementioned analysis, to identify any perception that occurs in the domain of the psychology of the characters since it is associated with the linguistic means.

II. The Selection of the Story

"HE" is a fiction short story and defiantly fiction and history have to some extent the same features of characters, place, time, causes and effects, etc. The difference between them is in fiction’s subjectivity and non-fiction’s (history, biography, etc.) objectivity (Rauf & Danail, 2021:36). So, being fictional is the first reason for selecting this story.

Although the selected story is short, it is chosen for various reasons. Katherine Anne Porter who was the author of the short story “HE” introduced four elements that distinguish, intrigue, and enhance the story. These include the protagonist’s point of view, the capitalization of the pronouns “HE” and "HIM", the themes of solitude and fragmentation, and the story’s final scene. All these factors have psychological inferences which will be discussed in the following sections.

III. Models Selected for the Study

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Both Structuralism and Deconstruction assert that “Language is non referential” but from different perspectives. Language is so, according to structuralism, since it does not correspond to objects or things in the world but only to our perceptions of things in the world. Signifiers, on the other hand, refers to the play of signifiers that language itself consists, rather than to things in the world or our perceptions of things.

**Derrida (1970)**

Derrida (1970) employed various binary oppositions to explain his work “Differance”. As a result, it is tended to conceptualize our experience in terms of binary oppositions. These binary oppositions, however, are not wholly opposing; they are hierarchical (one is superior to the other), overlap, and share some characteristics together. Deconstruction is primarily concerned with language as a dynamic, ambiguous, and unstable medium that constantly disseminates potential meanings. Existence lacks a focal point, a stable meaning, and a firm structure. The reader creates meaning through the process of reading. Nonetheless, the generated meaning is not a stable entity. Human beings are fractured battlegrounds for opposing ideologies.

**Roland Barthes (1974)**

While Roland Barthes (1974), a French linguist and structuralist, asserts that a text or narrative is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signified, capable of establishing many meanings through the readers' participation in a meaning making phenomena. He rejects the conventional idea of interpreting a story in terms of the text's closed structure or the author's fixed point of view. According to Barthes, the text is like a tangled ball of strings that has to be unraveled. He feels that attempting to identify the structure is fruitless because each text or narrative has a 'difference' from the others. He believes, however, that such variation is not the consequence of any form of uniqueness; rather, it is the outcome of textuality itself. Additionally, he asserts that some works attempt to dissuade readers from freely connecting text and this 'already written' by emphasizing specific meaning and reference. A realistic novel presents a narrative that is 'closed' and has a restricted meaning, whereas other texts invite the reader to generate meanings. Barthes proposed his five-code theory, which aids the reader in unraveling and comprehending the underlying structure of a text or narrative. He proposed that these five codes represent the fundamental underlying structures of all narratives (Barry, 2002:151). Only once these codes have been applied to the various literary texts and tales, they can be classified for their form and genre.

1. **The Hermeneutic / Enigma Code**

The hermeneutic code, also known as the enigmatic code, refers to those components of a text that create mystery and intriguing situations inside a text or story, making readers more curious and interested in learning or understanding more. It is the method through which a story avoids disclosing the truth or providing all of the information in order to drop hints and generate mystery and suspense. According to Selden (2005), “the hermeneutic code addresses the mystery that develops whenever conversation begins.” The reader, on the other hand, attempts to unravel the mystery of these elements by asking various questions, such as What is going on? What is the impediment? Who was the murderer? How will the hero's mission be accomplished? Some of the text's enigmatic features are resolved at the end, while others remain a mystery to the reader. The reader uses his or her mental faculties to interpret the text.

2. **The Proairetic / Action Code**

The proairetic / action code refers to the text's sequential parts of action. This code assists readers in interpreting and identifying what is about to occur. According to Selden (2005), “the proairetic code (or code of acts) concerns the essential sequential logic of action and behavior,” and it maintains the reader's interest in the upcoming events. This code is an important aspect of a conventional literary work in which the reader discovers a chronological sequence in the story's actions, settings, and characters. The proairetic / action code aids readers in understanding the chronological order of acts and their reactions, whereas the hermeneutic code aids readers in resolving riddles and perplexing events. The usage of these two codes allows readers to get the core of the plot.

3. **The Semantic Code**

The story's characterization. The proairetic / action code assists readers in understanding the logical order of acts and their reactions, whereas the hermeneutic code supports readers in resolving ambiguities and confusing settings. The usage of these two codes enables viewers to get the gist of the plot.

4. **The Symbolic Code**

Within a text. The antithetic code is another name for this code. The code is similar to semantic code in certain ways, but its function is more complex. It refers to factors that provide significance via binary opposition or antithesis because the concept of binary oppositions is important to Structuralism theory. A structuralist perceives reality through these binary oppositions (Barry, 2002:151).

5. **The Referential / Cultural Code**

This Cultural Code, also known as the referential code, indicates any information in a text or narrative that relates to an exterior base of information, such as historical, scientific, or cultural insight. A reader can obtain physical,
physiological, medicinal, psychological, literary, or historical knowledge through this code.

Psycholinguistic Analysis

Psycholinguistic analysis is utilized along with the previous two approaches. It focuses on linguistic units utilised by the author throughout the text. Linguistic units are like lexical choices, syntactic structure, phonological and morphological units, capitalization and (lexical) diversity, etc. Hence, there arises the need to figure out the psycholinguistic assumptions of the analysis as well as interpretation of a literary text by processing the linguistic units.

Summary of “HE”

“He” is the name of the Whipples family's handicap son. “He” appears to be slow thinking. He is speechless and never gets hurt, or at least does not notice. Elmy and Adna Whipples are the other daughters in the Whipples family. He is ten years old, and the other children are older. The family owns a farm where everyone shares, but they are still impoverished and have a difficult life that is only becoming worse.

The mother is scared of what the neighbors will say about her and Him. That is why she overprotects Him and constantly tries hard to be a good mother to Him. When she talks to her neighbors, she claims that she loves Him more than the other two, and sometimes she claims that she loves Him more than her mother and her husband, Mr. Whipple, all four of them together. She is terrified that the neighbors would have a terrible opinion of Him and that anything will happen to Him. He becomes sick the next winter. He appears to be having a fit, and his parents attempt everything they can to help Him for two days, but He does not get well. As a result, they took Him to the doctor. So, the doctor advised them to keep Him as warm as possible with all of their blankets and to feed Him plenty of food such as milk and eggs. He'll get influenza if he doesn't. His parents followed the doctor's instruction and He appears to be fine again in early spring.

Later, Adna and Elmy will leave and travel to town, where one will study and the other will work in a market to make money. At the moment, the Whipple family was poorer than they had ever been, and it was not going to get any better. The bull should come across for fertilizing the same summer. Mrs. Whipple sends Him to collect the bull, which is only three miles away. She was pretty calm at first, but she became increasingly worried and anxious, fearing that the bull would do something to Him and He would not have the wisdom to go. Despite the fact that nothing happened to Him, the mother bursts into tears. He slipped on snowy soil the next winter but instead of getting up, He began to roll around and cry. The father went to the doctor many times right away. He was kept as warm as possible at all times, and they were more concerned with Him than ever before.

One day, the doctor informed them that He would never be able to recover. He also advises that He should be placed in a County Home. Mrs. Whipple first opposes the idea, claiming that the doctor suggested that because they would not be able to pay their fees in time but she recognizes that if she wants to keep Him alive, she has no other choice. Mrs. and Mr. Whipples, as well as Him, were taken to the hospital by their neighbor with a carryall. He was crying, as if He was blaming her for something. This might be because He didn't want to go fetch the bull because He was terrified but couldn't tell her, or since it was the first winter (where the family already did not have enough money). He was cold since she had taken some of His blankets and given them to Elmy and Adna, who had a long walk to school and so on.

IV METHODOLOGY

Methodologies followed in analyzing the story is; firstly, as the same method adopted by Barthes in Sarrasine. That's to say by classifying the story into lexias then labeling them with the codes appropriate for each one with an adequate interpretation for each one of them. As Barthes has pointed, and according to what concerns us here, Readerly texts are indeed constrained products. They can be further subdivided based on how they are interpreted. Interpretation restores the notion of a plural text as, 'a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signified; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to. It has multiple entrances, none of which can be declared authoritatively to be the main one. Interpretation is endless and infinite. Interpretation should not enforce a specific meaning, but rather emphasize radical plurality. Secondly, a psycholinguistic analysis accompanied to Barthes approach to reveal the intention of the writer behind using different linguistic means.

Accordingly, Derrida's approach is also applied in this study to assert the concept of plurality to reveal the text’s undecidability, i.e. to show that the meaning of the text is plural, indefinite, having many meanings. To reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which a text is constructed. The main characters are He, His mother Mrs. Whipple, His father Mr. Whipple and the neighbors.

In this study, the text is classified into 26 lexias. The application is as follows:

**Barthes's Approach and Psycholinguistic Analysis**

A. “HE”

The capitalizing of the pronouns “He” and “Him” gives either the importance or the isolation and fragmentations of this character (SEM). By capitalizing and titling, it may hold a signification of a physical and psychological distinction of this character among others (REF). Moreover, an integration of a psychological image drawn in the reader’s mind with the capitalized “He” a long with the description of the boy in the story.

B. "it was hard to keep the children in flannels during the winter."

The use of this word connotes how can children be kept warm in such a texture of cloth in winter (SEM). Poverty. It also set a scene of children with the flannels in the reader’s mind reflecting poverty.

C. “Don’t ever let a soul hear us complain,” she kept saying to her husband. She couldn’t stand to be pitied.

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“No, not if it comes to it that we have to live in a wagon and pick cotton around the country,” she said, “nobody’s going to get a chance to look down on us”

Considering the above lexical expressions, it can be noticed that the connotations gained represent two twisted ideas: Mrs. Whipple's fear to be watched by neighbors and to be devalue. (SEM), which is naturally a cultural habit (REF). From a psycholinguistic point of view, it can be inferred that the usage of the underlined sentences; be pitied, live in a wagon and look down is used to show the contradictory in the mother's personality.

D. “They said. “It’s the sins of the fathers,” they agreed among themselves. “There’s bad blood and bad doings somewhere, you can bet on that. “This behind the Whipples’ back. To their faces everybody said, “He’s not so bad off, He’ll be all right yet. Look how He grows!”

What "neighbors" think and chat among each other contradicts what they pretend to be before her. Double faces for the same coin, "neighbors"(SYM). It is the social traditions of the society (REF, social). From a psycholinguistic point of view, it can be noticed that these people don’t want to cause her any harm in her feelings towards her son, although they thought of “sins”, “bad blood” and “bad doing” they changed their face expressions “their faces”.

E. “I wouldn’t have anything happen to Him for all the world, but it just looks like I can’t keep Him out of mischief. He’s so strong and active. He’s always into everything.”

This refers to her care and love to her retarded son as she wants everyone to believe…in fact she wants to believe herself (HER). Enigma. But she soon recoils from this idea saying that the connotations gained represent two twisted ideas; be pitied, live in a wagon and look down is used to show the contradictory in the mother's personality.

F. “The preacher said such a nice thing once when he was here. He said, and I’ll remember it to my dying day, the innocent walk with God that’s why He don’t get hurt”.

Considering the preacher's speech is a “must” for people in their community (REF, religious). What invokes the reader here is; how can a walk be "innocent", with God there something from Devine in HIM (HER, religious). The reader here will consider the power of God putting such physical power in HIM perhaps as a blessing to this family.

G. “HE didn’t whine for food as the other children did, He could carry twice as much wood and water as Adna. He never seemed to mind the cold”.

Here are the qualities of "He". "Connotation for" indicate how "He" endures; never complains, never demands for Himself (SEM but These comments on Him by Mrs. Whipple are only to impress her neighbors, (REF, psychological). Her psychological mind set is designed to show off these characteristics of her son. Although she knows that He endures and definitely suffers, but she doesn’t behave as real mother in protecting Him.

H. “Mrs. Whipple almost screamed out at the neighbor. “He does know what He’s doing! He’s as able as any other child! Come down out of there, you!” When He finally reached the ground she could hardly keep her hands off Him for acting like that before people, a grin all over His face and her worried sick about Him all the time”.

It is clear for the reader here how much Mrs. Whipple cares about her son (SEM). But not for the sake of his safety, it was not the "Mother's Love" it is feeling ashamed from her son's behavior before her neighbors, (binary opposition) accompanied by a slap which will reveal or uncover this feeling (SYM). Psychologically speaking, the mother acts to hang Him. She has kind of phobia from people’s negative impression which will, as she fears, stick in her neighbor’s mind.

I. “It’s the neighbors,” said Mrs. Whipple to her husband. “Oh, I do mortally wish they would keep out of our business. I can’t afford to let Him do anything for fear they’ll come nosing around about it. Look at the bees, now. Adna can’t handle them, they sting him up so; I haven’t got time to do everything, and now I don’t dare let Him. But if He gets a sting He don’t really mind”.

The first mentioning of "neighbors" indicates "help" or "support" and at the same time (REF, cultural) but the fact it is sooner followed by the words "nosing" and "bees" which is the tiny worm which provides honey but at the same time it stings. The verb "nose" is the human organ symbolizing curiosity of the neighbors. (SYM: antithetic).

What is worth mentioning here is what opposes the (REF, psychological) in the last line where the mother doesn't care if He has been stung or not as she said. So she is a kind of human that is selfish for caring about her benefits and affairs regardless to her son’s feelings or His physical injuries.

J. It’s just because He ain’t got sense enough to be scared of anything,” said Mr. Whipple.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” said Mrs. Whipple, “talking that way about your own child she said, “we’ll just butcher one of the suckling pigs”.

A "connotation against" is represented in the mother's attitude towards her husband by defending her son He, the feeling which is puzzling. (HER)

There is a referential code (REF, cultural) in butchering a pig for their guest as a social hospitality. It is obvious here that she is pretending to care about Him by blaming her husband for his harsh words in describing his son being senseless but in fact she herself does not care about His health but using Him to manage her and her daughter’s affairs.

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K. “It’s a waste and I don’t hold with waste the way we are now,” said Mr. Whipple. “That pig will be worth money by Christmas.”

“Christmas” is a social/cultural occasion at which they cook valuable meals like pigs(REF). Again, Mrs. Whipple would rather prefer to lie than give her brother’s wife or anyone a chance to look down on her (REF, Psychological). Here comes again another sign of phobia from others’ view of her image. She wants to appear in as classy as possible.

L. “All right, old fraidy,” said Mrs. Whipple, “He’s not scared. Watch Him do it.” And she laughed as though it was all a good joke and gave Him a little push towards the pen.

Examining the italicized way in which “He” is printed(SEM) when Mrs. Whipple talk about Him expressing a sort of irony (SEM)“joke”, “push” leaving the reader waiting the next event in the pen(ACT). Obviously, she doesn’t care about Him by humiliating “old fraidy”, urging Him every now and then to do things even if He gets hurt.

M. “He’d eat it all if I didn’t stop Him. He’d eat up every mouthful from the other two if I’d let Him”.

Another negative impression by the mother about He (SEM). He receives extra portions of food, piling up his dish, she also criticizes Him, to herself, about how much He eats. It is clear here as she contradicts the nature of a mother watching her son’s mouth, fearing that he would eat a lot.

N. “He was dirty again, with crawling under fences after a possum, and straddling along the rafters of the barn looking for eggs in the hayloft.”

A natural appearance of a “simple minded” boy (SEM) as His mother calls Him(ACT).

How cold hearted this mother is towards her retarded son expressing disgust from His dirty appearance although He is serving her.

O. “The brother came with his plump healthy wife and two great roaring hungry boys”.

Two signifiers for gourmand persons; “brother’s wife and children” (SEM). What is the scene of the banquet is going to look like (ACT)? Another scene of show off prepared by the mother for her brother’s family.

P. “you’re going to have to roll me home like I was a barrel when I’m done”.

No doubt, according to the connotations of the underlined words, that Mrs. Whipple’s brother is going to eat much (SEM). When other members of the family are well treated, He is humiliated.

Q. “He does the outdoor chores; He can wear your tarpaulin coat. I can’t do no better, that’s all”.

What these words indicate, that ”He” does all the hard work and, in turn, “He” is dressed the worst (SEM). An additional harsh treatment for Him by the psycho mother.

R. “He was taken sick, and lay curled up under His blanket looking very blue in the face and acting as if He would choke”.

The modifiers (SEM) mirror sickness of ”He” which raise a question in the reader’s mind; What is the mother's reaction(ACT)? From a psychological point of view, He needs kindness and mercy pretending to choke begging for some love and pity from the cruel hearted mother.

S. “At first Mrs. Whipple felt easy in her mind about sending Him for the bull. Adna was too jumpy and couldn’t be trusted”.

T. “He came on very slowly leading the big hulk of an animal by a ring in the nose, twirling a little stick in His hand, never looking back or sideways, but coming on like a sleepwalker with His eyes half shut”.

The following verbs denote the strength of ”He” in such situations. What lies beneath Mrs. Whipple’s motives? (HER), Is she really proud of Him for His lack of fear? (HER) Or does she not care if ”He” gets hurt because in her mind, he feels no pain? (HER). From psychological point of view, the mother does not care about Him compared with her other children. She sends Him to do hard work even if he gets hurt.

U. “Mrs. Whipple was scared sick of bulls”.

Although that this animal is a “beast”, being wild and strong as they call it but it constitutes their source of living (SYM). Another sign of careless for His safety for the sake of their living.

V. “Lord, don’t let anything happen to Him. Lord, you know people will say we oughtn’t to have sent Him. You know they’ll say we didn’t take care of Him. Oh, get Him home, safe home, safe home, and I’ll look out for Him better! Amen”.

Again the usage of the italicized font (SEM) for the verbs of Devine represent the extent the mother is conscious of the unpleasant image of a careless mom (REF, social) praying “HE” will return home safe. (ACT).A complicated personality who is not worried about her son “He”as much as she is worried about what the neighbors would say about her and how she sent him to do hard labor.

W. “He slipped on the ice coming up from the barn”.

”HE” is always at trouble (SEM) but is it serious this time (ACT).

X. “All at once she saw it full summer again, with the garden going fine, and new white roller shades up all over the house, and Adna and Emly home, so full of life, all of them happy together. Oh, it could happen, things would ease up on them”.

A group of signs marking happiness of a gathered family (SEM), (ACT). On this scene, she feels, ironically, happy with the charming summer view with her both daughters at home.  

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with her "all of them happy together" neglecting her son's suffering from pain.

Z. “She began to cry, frightfully, and wrapped her arms tight around Him. His head rolled on her shoulder: she had loved Him as much as she possibly could, there were Adna and Emily who had to be thought of too, was nothing she could do to make up to Him for His life. Oh, what a mortal pity "He" was ever born”.

AA. “They came in sight of the hospital, with the neighbor driving very fast, not daring to look behind him”.

Nothing to say now "HE" is gone…. (SEM).

Derrida’s Approach Analysis

Fragmentation of the insight of Mrs. Whipple’s personality is shown in a way that it seems to mislead the reader in such a realistic story.

Mrs. Whipple (the mother) in this short story doesn’t only represent a pivotal character but also demonstrates a dynamic figure that a language has as Derrida claimed. It is “Difference” which has binary oppositions. They are not completely opposite, they are hierarchical one is superior the other, they overlap and share things in common.

1-Care vs. Ashamed

This is evidently manifested in Mrs. Whipple character when she plays the role of devoted mother who mortally cares about her son especially before neighbors.

On the other hand, she pushes him to do the most difficult and dangerous tasks at the animal’s barn keeping her other normal children safe. She is also uncertain of her feelings that she diminishes her love for her other two children in order to garner enough love for Him. She often tells her neighbors that she loves Him more than her two other children put together. But finally she is the one who is responsible for the death of this poor handicap boy.

2-Body ability vs. Mental deficiency

He himself also has proved what Derrida claim in his theory. As the reader traces his behavior in acting better than his normal brother in doing all the hard work at home featuring a totally different image from a retarded person.

Being injured sometime and hurt without any complains as if he does not feel but in fact he suffers and feels but never morns (as children in his age which is only ten).

However, in the last scene all those emotions have been revealed when he expressed his feelings to mother about all what she caused to him.

3-Praise vs. Gossip

Lastly "the neighbors" also are recognized by the double faces (binary opposition) they have when they praise Mrs. Whipple’s "He" but when she turns her back " they shoot her with sharp comments blaming her for her carelessness about her child. Moreover, this neighbor him drag himself away when "He" was in need for help in the hospital.

V. CONCLUSION

Both Barthes and Derrida approaches have presented well descriptive techniques of this short story each of which in terms of his methodology from different perspective, in a way that the former refers to the fact that each "sign" (linguistic means) has its reference to specific object or concept in the reader’s mind while the later deconstructs language to the extent it neither refers to things in the world nor to our concepts of things but to “signifiers” which are in a continuous dynamic image. As for psycholinguistic analysis, it penetrates the borders of the linguistic means in diving in the characters’ thoughts, behaviours, feelings drawing a clear image for the reader to not only to read the tale but also to imagine and feel what the character feels.

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